

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

Please amend the claims to read as follows:

1. (original) A free ink marking instrument for dispensing an ink, comprising:
  - a housing;
  - a reservoir for storing fluid ink within the housing;
  - a feed tube to convey fluid ink, communicating with the reservoir;
  - a porous tip disposed within the feed tube for conveying ink to a substrate at a marking end of the tip;
  - a porous buffer disposed within the housing adjacent the feed tube and configured for storing ink during periods of a decreasing pressure differential between the reservoir and the atmosphere;
  - a passage formed between the outside surface of the tip and the inside surface of the feed tube, wherein the passage has a mean thickness of about 0.010 in. to about 0.025 in.
2. (original) The instrument of claim 1, wherein the end of the feed tube closest to the tip is disposed at about 0.5 in. to about 1.5 in. from the marking end of the tip.
3. (original) The instrument of claim 1, wherein a portion of the buffer is in disposed in capillary coupling contact to a portion of the tip.
4. (original) The instrument of claim 1, wherein the tip comprises a shoulder near the end of the tip disposed within the feed tube and further comprising a second passage formed between the end surface of the feed tube and the surface of the shoulder, the second passage in fluid communication with the passage formed between the outside surface of the tip and the inside surface of the feed tube.
5. (original) The instrument of claim 4, wherein the second passage has a mean thickness of about 0.002 in. to about 0.030 in.
6. (original) The instrument of claim 4, wherein the end of the feed tube closest to the tip is disposed at about 0.5 in. to about 1.5 in. from the marking end of the tip.

7. (original) The instrument of claim 1, wherein the capillarity of the tip is greater than the capillarity of the buffer and greater than the capillarity of the passage.

8. (original) The instrument of claim 1, wherein the tip is secured against substantial movement in the axial direction.

9 - 18 (cancelled)

19. (original) A free ink marking instrument for dispensing an ink, comprising:

a housing;

a reservoir for storing fluid ink within the housing;

a feed tube to convey fluid ink, communicating with the reservoir, wherein the feed tube has primary and secondary ends at one extremity;

a porous tip disposed within the extremity of the feed tube having primary and secondary ends;

a porous buffer disposed within the housing adjacent the feed tube and configured for storing ink during periods of a decreasing pressure differential between the reservoir and the atmosphere; and

a vent hole formed between a secondary end of the feed tube and a butt end of the tip disposed within the feed tube.

20. (original) The instrument of claim 19, wherein a vent hole is disposed at about 0.5 in. to about 1.5 in. from the marking end of the tip.

21. (original) The instrument of claim 19, wherein a portion of the buffer is in disposed in capillary coupling contact to a portion of the tip.

22. (original) The instrument of claim 19, wherein the capillarity of the tip is greater than the capillarity of the buffer and greater than the capillarity of the vent hole.

23. (original) The instrument of claim 19, wherein the tip is secured against substantial movement in the axial direction.

24. (original) The instrument of claim 19, wherein the tip comprises a shoulder near the end of the tip disposed within the feed tube, and the primary ends of the feed tube abut the shoulder.

25. (original) The instrument of claim 19, wherein a plurality of vent holes are formed between secondary ends of the feed tube and the butt end of the tip disposed within the feed tube.

26. (original) The instrument of claim 19, wherein the tip is disposed in interference fit within the feed tube.

27. (original) The instrument of claim 19, wherein a vent hole has a mean radius of curvature in a range of about 0.002 in. to about 0.012 in.